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*Subject and Object in Biblical Aramaic:*

*A Functional Approach*

*Based on Form—Content Analysis*

by

D. R. Cohen



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**SUBJECT AND OBJECT IN BIBLICAL ARAMAIC:  
 A FUNCTIONAL APPROACH BASED ON FORM-CONTENT ANALYSIS**

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Traditional analyses of case in Biblical Aramaic cannot explain how people used the language to communicate because--among other reasons--one signal *lā* indicates both dative and accusative. In this new Form-Content analysis of BA case, *lā*--like all signals--is associated with only one meaning: of MID importance in precipitating the occurrence. In the paper, the objective pronominal suffix is also redefined, in a way that can account for the hitherto inexplicable occurrence in Daniel 5:6. Finally, comparison is made with recent transformational approaches to case, showing that they share many of the failings of the traditional approaches.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

It has long been recognized that a primary task of linguistics is to account for the distribution of the forms in a language. The modern, transformational-generative schools of linguistics do this by postulating deep structures (or logical structures) and sets of transformations which operate on these structures to produce SURFACE STRUCTURES--i.e., SENTENCES in normal parlance. The traditional grammarians accounted for the distribution of forms by assigning one or more functions to each form, and by recognizing constructions (of more than one form) as having functions as well.

I should like to submit that such an accounting for the distribution of forms is inadequate. In order to fully understand language, we must view it in its communicative function. Linguistics, therefore, must tell us how people communicate using language. It must thus tell us, for each linguistic unit that we establish in our analysis, not only its distribution, but also its COMMUNICATIVE function--that is, its single and constant meaning by means of which users of the language can unambiguously communicate.

In this paper, we shall investigate the expression of SUBJECTS and OBJECTS (direct and indirect) in Biblical Aramaic. We shall demonstrate that an analysis based on a single meaning per form is not only possible, but is more successful in explaining the data than is traditional grammar. We shall also compare this analysis in general terms with recent transformational analyses of similar phenomena in other languages. Finally, we shall discuss the implications of a form-content analysis for future work in linguistics.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. TRADITIONAL GRAMMAR<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1. Subjects

The noun or pronoun which is the subject of a verbal sentence in Biblical Aramaic is not marked in any way. In Biblical Aramaic, nouns are not inflected for case; they are inflected only for gender, number, and state. Since there is no set word order in Biblical Aramaic, one cannot depend on position in the sentence to identify subjects, either. The only clue to determining subjects is that the verb agrees with its subject in person, number, and gender.

Biblical Aramaic has both active and passive verbs, as well as a third category--reflexive--which behaves sometimes as a true reflexive/reciprocal, but most of the time as a passive. Thus, as in all languages with active and passive, the grammatical subject can be the logical subject (active) or the logical object (passive).

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<sup>1</sup>This is an expanded and revised version of my Master's essay, "On Inferring Participant Roles in Biblical Aramaic." A brief report on the major ideas presented here was delivered at the 1972 Summer Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America in Chapel Hill, N.C., under the title "Taking Morphology Seriously: Case in Biblical Aramaic."

I wish to express my thanks to my advisor, Prof. Joseph Malone of Columbia University; I also wish to thank for their help in all phases of this research, Prof. William Diver of Columbia University and Prof. Erica García of C.U.N.Y. Of course, any errors in this paper are my own responsibility.

<sup>2</sup>The bibliography lists the traditional grammars I have referred to in preparing this study. The four most important works that I have had recourse to in preparing this sketch on the syntax of traditional grammar are:

Bauer and Leander §§ 75, 100, 101

Kautzsch §§ 68, 184, 89

Marti §§ 24, 103-110

Rosenthal §§ 1, 31, 36, 41, 76, 79, 98, 99, 174, 180, 182-185



## 2.2. Indirect Objects

Indirect objects in Biblical Aramaic are introduced by the preposition *l*. This use of the preposition *l* is common to all the Semitic languages. In addition, *l* has other uses in Biblical Aramaic which we shall not discuss in the main body of this paper, though we will refer to them at the end of the paper.

## 2.3. Direct Objects

Direct objects in Biblical Aramaic are indicated in any one of three ways.<sup>3</sup> The following sentence contains a subject and indirect object, indicated in their usual fashion, and a direct object which is completely unindicated:

D 2:7 *malʾkōʾ* *hēlāmōʾ* *yeʾmar* *lʾabədowhiy*  
king (m.s.) dream (m.s.) he will tell *l* + his servants  
SUBJECT DIRECT OBJECT INDIRECT OBJECT  
'Let the King tell his servants the dream'<sup>4</sup>

The direct object may also be introduced by the preposition *l*. For example:

D:2:25 *ʾēdayin* *ʾarəyowk* ... *hanəʿel* *lʾədnīyeʾl*  
then Arioch he brought *l* + Daniel  
SUBJECT DIRECT OBJECT  
'Then Arioch brought in Daniel (before the king in haste).'

Finally, the direct object may be referred to by an objective pronominal suffix attached to the verb:

D 4:2 *hēlem* *hāzeyt* *wiydahāliNaniy*  
dream I saw and + it frightens + me  
(SUBJECT) (SUBJECT) DIRECT OBJECT  
'I saw a dream which made me afraid.'

It should be made clear at this point that the preposition *l* can be used to introduce either an indirect object or a direct object. This is not an instance of an indeterminate function; the traditional grammarians rigorously distinguished between these two functions. There are two criteria which are brought to bear in determining whether *l* in a given instance introduces a direct object or an indirect object. Both of these criteria rest with other occurrences of the same verb, where it is unambiguous as to whether the verb governs direct objects or indirect objects. For example, in Daniel 5:13, the verb 'to bring' is in the passive.

<sup>3</sup>There is one occurrence in the Biblical Aramaic corpus of the accusative marker *-yšt* in *Daniel* 3:12. However, as there is only one occurrence, I have not included this particle in the study.

<sup>4</sup>In all examples, we shall first present a graphemic transcription of the Masoretic text. (*Dagesh* is indicated by a capital letter.) D = *Daniel*, and E = *Ezra*. Any letter in a parentheses () in the transcription represents a marginal comment that the letter is superfluous. Directly below the transcriptions are the lexical meanings; below them are grammatical meanings. The translations, appearing after another double space, are taken from the Jewish Publication Society of America. Words in parentheses in the translation supply context.

D 5:13 *Beʿdayin* *ḏaniyeʿel* *huʿal* *qəḏom maləkəʿ*  
 then Daniel he was brought before king

SUBJECT (of passive)

'Then was Daniel brought in before the king.'

According to the traditional grammarians, only direct objects can be the subjects of passive verbs. Therefore, sentence D 5:13 is proof that the verb 'to bring in' governs direct objects. And therefore, 'Daniel' in D 2:25, even though it is introduced by *el*, is a direct object.

The second criterion is whether the verb is found to govern an object which is unambiguously direct--e.g. the objective pronominal suffix. For example, in

D 6:17 *huwʿ* *yəḏeyzəbiNək*  
 he he will deliver + thee

SUBJECT

DIRECT OBJECT

'He will deliver thee.'

the verb 'deliver' governs a direct object object indicated by an objective pronominal suffix. Therefore, in

D 3:28 *Diy - ṣəlah* *maləʿakeH* *wəḏeziyb* *ləʿabəḏowhiy*  
 who (he) sent his angel and + he delivered *el* + his servants

SUBJECT

DIRECT OBJECT

(SUBJECT)

DIRECT OBJECT

'Who hath sent His angel and delivered His servants.'

we know that 'His servants' is a direct object.

It should be clear at this point that direct object and indirect object were completely distinct grammatical categories as far as the traditional grammarians were concerned. Not only could they each occur as the sole object in a sentence, but in a sentence with two objects, there could be one direct and one indirect (e.g. D 2:7 above), or there could be two direct objects:

E 5:10 *wəʿap* *ṣəməhəṭəhom* *ṣəʿelənəʿ* *ləhom*  
 and + also their names we asked *el* + them

DIRECT OBJECT

(SUBJECT)

DIRECT OBJECT

'We asked them their names also.'

D 5:17 *Kəṭəbəʿ* *ʿeqəreʿ* *ləmaləkəʿ* *wəpišəreʿ* *ʿəhowdəʿiNəH*  
 writing I shall read *el* + king and + interp. I will tell + him  
 DIRECT OBJECT (SUBJECT) INDIRECT OBJECT DIRECT OBJECT (SUBJECT) DIRECT OBJECT

'I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation.'

Such construction with two direct objects (similar to the double accusative constructions of Latin) are quite common in Biblical Aramaic.

### 3. THE INADEQUACIES OF TRADITIONAL GRAMMAR

The analysis presented in section 2 is common to all of the traditional grammarians. It contains several glaring inadequacies when considered from a functional communicative viewpoint:

A) How does a speaker know when to introduce a direct object with *l*, and when to leave it unindicated? After all, the grammarians attributed no functional difference to these two different ways of introducing the direct object. (The third method--objective pronominal suffixes--involves pronominal reference, which is a functional difference relating to a different part of the grammar. That is, the choice between this third method and the first two is at least in part dependent on the decision as to whether to refer to the direct object nominally or pronominally.)

B) How does a hearer know whether a given *l* is introducing a direct object or an indirect object?

C) If the objective pronominal suffixes really indicate direct objects only, how does one explain the suffix in

D 5:6	ʔədayin	maləkəʔ	ziywohiy	šənowhiy	
	then	king	his countenances	they chanted (intrans.)	+ him
			SUBJECT		DIRECT OBJECT??

'Then the king's countenance was changed in him.'

bearing in mind that the verb 'change' is INTRANSITIVE?

In addition to these inadequacies, there are also several correlations (some of which have been noted by the grammarians themselves) which would appear to defy explanation if we accept the traditional analysis:

i) The vast majority of direct objects introduced by *l* are animate.

ii) Of the many occurrences of double direct objects, there are almost none in which both direct objects are introduced in the same manner.<sup>5</sup>

### 4. FORM-CONTENT ANALYSIS

#### 4.1. The Theory

Before presenting the form-content analysis of subjects and objects in Biblical Aramaic, I shall give an overview of the theory on which it is based, and which was developed by Prof. William Diver of Columbia University. The two basic premises of the theory are:

i) that language is an instance of human behavior, and

ii) that language is a device for communication.

<sup>5</sup>Two other correlations noticed by the grammarians are:

(i) A large percentage of the verbs in instances of *l* introducing a direct object are infinitives and participles.

(ii) No direct objects introduced by *l* are in the absolute state.

I have no comment on correlation i), which was noticed only by Rosenthal, p. 56. Correlation ii) is discussed later in this paper.

In applying this theory, we embrace the Saussurean notion of SIGN which is a unit of form and content. The form of a sign is the SIGNAL--i.e., the actual morphology. The content is the MEANING. It is important to note that MEANING as we shall here use the term can be applied only to signs--not to combinations of signs. (In Bloomfield's terms (1933:264) our MEANING would be a NOEME but not necessarily a LINGUISTIC MEANING.)

In communication, these signs are juxtaposed in such a manner as to enable one to INFER a MESSAGE. This message is what would be termed in other theories of linguistics SENTENTIAL MEANING. The process of inference referred to above is of major importance in the theory. It is in fact the link between the finite number of signs in the language and the infinite number of potential messages. For example, let us examine the following three sentences:

- a) *John paid the bill.*
- b) *John paid the clerk.*
- c) *John paid the money.*

In each of the sentences, we have an act of paying, of which 'John' is the "subject."<sup>6</sup> The sentences differ from each other in that they have different objects. However, the only thing in common that these three objects have is that they are less important in precipitating the paying than 'John.' That is to say, with respect to the activity of paying, their behavior is less AGENT-LIKE than John's. There is nothing in the sentence that tells us that the object in a) is financially satisfied by the action, that the object in b) receives payment, and that the object in c) changes hands. This information we INFER from the lexical and grammatical meanings in the sentence, along with our knowledge of the basics of economic behavior in Western Society.

Another important part of the theory is the distinction between lexical and grammatical signs. These are distinguished in both form and content. In form, lexical signals can only be morphological signals--i.e. what we could call morphemes. Grammatical signals, however, can be morphological signals, or the arrangement of morphological signals (i.e. word order), or the absence of morphological signals ( $\emptyset$  - morpheme). On the content side, grammatical signals are those whose meanings are grouped into systems. Each system embraces a SUBSTANCE of meaning, such that the meanings of the signals which form the system exhaustively subdivide that substance.

As an example, let us take the system of number in English. The substance is the quantitative description of the objects under discussion. There are two signs:  $\emptyset$ , whose meaning is that the object under discussion is considered as ONE, and 2, whose meaning is that the object under discussion is considered as MORE THAN ONE. It should be clear that these two meanings exhaustively subdivide the substance.<sup>7</sup>

It should be understood, of course, that the reason that  $\emptyset$  can serve as a grammatical signal is because of the closed nature of grammatical systems. If a substance is divided into a small finite number of parts, and the users of the language know when it is appropriate to discuss that substance of meaning, then  $\emptyset$  is just as communicative as any other signal. It should be

---

<sup>6</sup>Each theory of linguistics bears its own distinctive terminology, wherein each term can be rigorously defined according to the principles and axioms embodied in the theory. This is true not only of such theories as Prof. Diver's form-content theory, and transformational grammar, but of traditional grammar as well. If one uses a term that can be identified as belonging to a specific theory--such as "phoneme," for example--one invites one's readers to assume that the term is being accepted with all of its theoretical associations. During the course of this paper, I shall have recourse to refer to some terms from traditional grammar--such as "subject," "object," etc.--which are used only because they are common terms and facilitate communication. When I wish to EMPHASIZE that I am NOT accepting the theoretical implications of a term, I place the term in double quotes, as I have done here.

<sup>7</sup>This, of course, is a simplified sketch of the number system in English. In actual fact, this system interlocks with the article system: the book: the books :: a book:  $\emptyset$  books.

apparent from this, that no grammatical system can have two homonymous signals OPERATING IN THE SAME SYSTEM. This stricture applies to Ø as well as to morphological and/or word-order signals.

There is one more point about grammatical systems that should be brought out. Oftentimes, there are two grammatical systems, dealing with two different substances, which are INTERLOCKED. By interlocked, we mean 1), that some or all of their signals are shared, and 2), these systems describe--from different viewpoints--the same lexical items. For example, in Latin, the systems of number and "case" interlock, in that the same signal--e.g. *-arum*--indicates that a particular noun is both plural vis-a-vis the number system, and genitive, vis-a-vis the "case" system.

Before we go on to describing our analysis of subjects and objects in Biblical Aramaic, there is one other theoretical point which should be made, concerning inference. The example we gave of inference above dealt with inferring specific messages from grammatical meanings. However, messages can be inferred simply from lexical meanings alone. For example, picture a double door leading into a department store. On one of the doors there is a sign which reads "this door please." The message is obvious, even though there are no grammatical signals which say anything about "this door please." For another example, consider the following sentences:

- i) *Jim! Did you see that guy run that red light?*
- ii) *Jesus! Did you see that guy run that red light?*

Sentences (i) and (ii) are identical, except for the proper names at the beginning. Even the intonation of these sentences is identical. There are no grammatical signals associated with these proper names; their relation to the rest of the sentence or to the communication as a whole must be inferred. In fact, in sentences (i) and (ii), the relations are inferred differently: In (i), the proper name 'Jim' is a reference to the addressee; in (ii), the proper name 'Jesus' is an expression of shock, surprise, amazement, etc. In the course of this paper, we shall use the term BARE LEXICON to refer to those elements whose relation to the rest of the communication is not indicated grammatically or lexically (as, for example, with a preposition).

#### 4.2. The Analysis

What traditional grammars (and, so far, this paper) have referred to as "subject and object" in Biblical Aramaic is, in reality, the interlock of two systems: the system of focus, and the system of importance in precipitating the occurrence. The system of focus deals with that element of the sentence which is the "topic" under discussion. In traditional terms, the item in focus is the "grammatical subject." In our form-content analysis, the substance of focus has two signs: the verbal "subject-agreement" morphology is the signal whose meaning is that the element IN FOCUS is of such and such a person, number, and gender. The other meaning in the system of focus is NON-FOCUS, and there are two signals which indicate this meaning: the objective pronominal suffix means that an element of such and such a person, number, and gender is OUT OF FOCUS; and the preposition *l* means that the following noun (or pronoun) is (or refers to a noun that is) OUT OF FOCUS. In addition to these three signs in the system of focus, there are many other elements in the sentence which are completely noncommittal with respect to focus--they don't indicate IN FOCUS and they don't indicate OUT OF FOCUS.

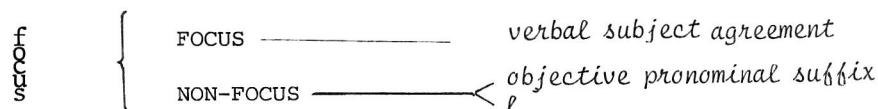
Let us re-examine our first example, now, in terms of focus.

D 2:7	<i>malʾkə?</i>	<i>hēlʾm?</i>	<i>yeʾmar</i>	<i>lʾʾabədowhiy</i>
	king (m.s.)	dream (m.s.)	he will tell	<i>l</i> + his servants
---	---	---	FOCUS = 3ms	NON-FOCUS
	'Let the king tell his servants the dream.'			

This verbal subject agreement morphology on the verb 'he will tell' tells us that the FOCUS is 'he'--i.e. third person masculine singular. The *l* on 'his servants' tells us that this element is OUT OF FOCUS. The two nouns 'king' and 'dream' are noncommittal with respect to the focus system. NONCOMMITTAL, of course, is a semi-technical term which means that these elements are

not marked explicitly by a grammatical signal. However, we must still INFER for these elements whether or not they are in focus. The nature of the substance of focus is that there is one entity in focus per situation, and all other entities are out of focus. In Daniel 2:7, we infer that the 'king' is the element in focus. (Our reasons for inferring that 'king' is the third person masculine singular element referred to by the verbal subject morphology (instead of 'dream', for example) will be discussed when we examine the other half of the interlock.)

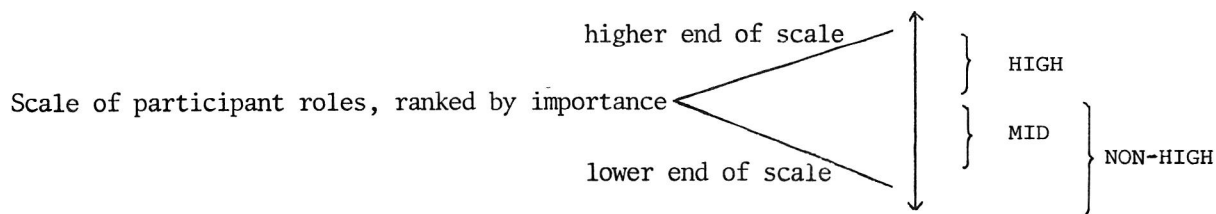
We can graphically represent the system of focus in Biblical Aramaic by the following diagram:



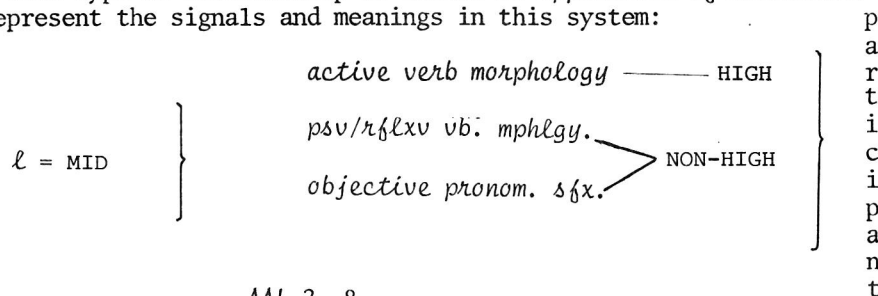
In this diagram, the signals are in *italics* and the meanings are in CAPS. The word "focus" to the left of the brace indicates that the signals and meanings inside the brace form the signs of the system of focus. The fork to the right of the meaning NON-FOCUS indicates that there are two signals, each of which has this meaning. (The choice between these two signals to express NON-FOCUS is determined by considerations external to the system of focus--namely, by considerations of the interlocking system--that of importance in precipitating the occurrence.)

The second system in the interlock is that of Importance in Precipitating the Occurrence. There are four signals and three meanings in this system. The verbal active voice morphology indicates that the focus is the HIGH participant--i.e., that participant having the greatest importance in precipitating the occurrence. The preposition *ℓ* indicates that the following noun (or pronoun) is (or refers to a noun that is) of MID importance in precipitating the occurrence. The objective pronominal suffix refers to a noun that is of NON-HIGH importance in precipitating the occurrence.

Before going into the exact nature of the relationships among these meanings, let us clarify the nature of the substance itself. In most events, we can isolate certain "real world" roles; these roles are, for example, causer, agent, instrument, recipient, beneficiary, willing patient, unwilling patient... By and large, we can rank these roles in terms of their importance in precipitating the occurrence. So, for example, a causer is more important in precipitating an occurrence than an agent who is caused to do something; and an instrument is less important than either. A beneficiary is still less important, although he is more important than a patient. The meanings in our participant system, however, are not so specific as "causer," "agent," etc.; rather, they are RELATIVE meanings. The following diagram represents the relationships among the meanings of the participant system in Biblical Aramaic.



Notice that NON-HIGH refers to the same part of the scale that MID does, except that it also extends lower than MID. This type of relationship is called an *opposition of inclusion*. The following diagram will represent the signals and meanings in this system:





Once again, the word "participant" outside the large brace indicates that those are the signs of the participant system. Meanings are in CAPS, and signals are in *italics*. The fork to the left of the meaning NON-HIGH indicates that there are two signals which have this meaning. The brace to the left of the same meaning indicates that NON-HIGH is the including meaning in an opposition of inclusion.

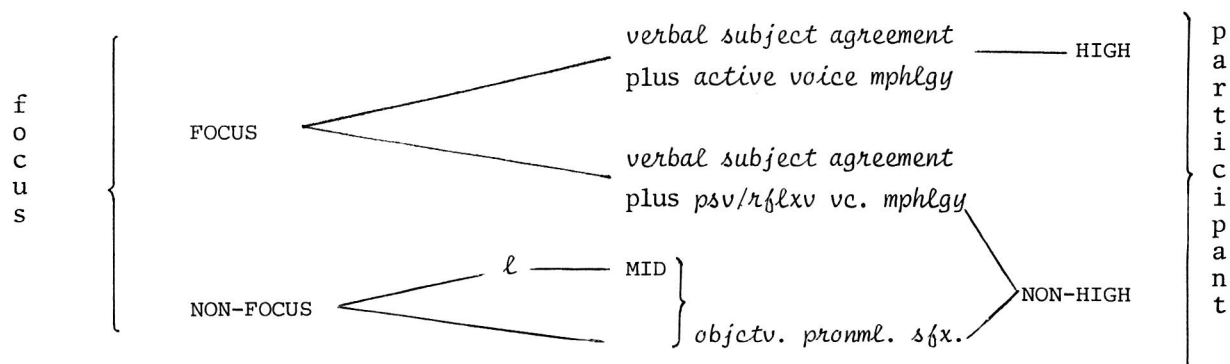
If we now look at Daniel 2:7 once more, we can see how the participant system works:

D 2:7    *maləkəʔ*            *hɛləmɔʔ*            *yeʔmar*            *ləʔabəɖowhiy*  
king (m.s.)    dream (m.s.)    he will tell    *l* + his servants  
FOC/HI = 3ms    NON-FOC/MID

'Let the king tell his servants the dream.'

This sentence describes an act of 'telling' and lists three potential participants: 'king', 'dream', and 'servants'. The grammatical meanings tell us that the element IN FOCUS is the HIGH PARTICIPANT and is the third person masculine singular; and that 'servants' is OUT OF FOCUS and a MID participant. To understand the communication, we must infer whether it makes more sense that the 'king' or the 'dream' (both of which are third person masculine singular) would play a higher role in an act of telling than the servants. Once the problem is so posed, of course, the solution is apparent. Common sense tells us that 'the king' did the telling (i.e., 'the king' was most important or agent-like in the telling). We shall discuss later the process whereby we infer that 'dream' is the third and least important participant in the occurrence. For the moment, we should simply note that 'dream' is bare lexicon, and therefore, noncommittal with respect to focus and participation.

We can now present in diagram form the interlocking systems of Focus and Importance in Precipitating the Occurrence:



### 4.3. The Validation

In the next several pages, we shall attempt to demonstrate how the analysis just presented explains how subjects and objects were communicated in Biblical Aramaic. First, we shall consider situations involving three participants, so that we can establish the most important, the next most important, and the least important. For example, if we take the situation of D 2:7--that of a king telling dreams to his servants--we can establish that the most important role there is played by the king--i.e. the person doing the telling. The dreams are the least important, in that they have no active or will willful in the occurrence. And the servants have a role somewhere in the middle in that they are encouraging the action, and they are going to be involved in the action in some way, but they are neither the most, nor the least important. (In general, what traditional grammarians have termed "indirect objects" are often participants which are neither most nor least important in precipitating the occurrence--e.g. recipients in

occurrences involving material or figurative transfers (giving, telling, sending...), purposes, motivations, and/or beneficiaries of occurrences, etc.)<sup>8</sup>

We can now look at the actual example of D 2:7 to see if the grammatical signs used there are compatible with the foregoing participant role analysis. The verbal morphology tells us the FOCUS is on the HIGH PARTICIPANT, and that this participant is third person masculine singular. 'Servants' is marked as a MID participant and OUT OF FOCUS. And there are two bare lexical elements: 'dream' and 'king'. We have no way of knowing whether these bare lexical elements are to be viewed as participants or not, since they could be indicating temporal and/or spatial relations, or other types of information. However, one thing is true of bare lexical elements: because their relation to the rest of the sentence can only be inferred, it is usually the case that such an inference is obvious on the basis of the lexical meaning of the element alone. In the case of 'king' and 'dream' they both appear to be likely candidates for participantship, given an occurrence of telling. Furthermore, it makes sense that 'king' rather than 'dream' is the one doing the telling--i.e., a high participant; and it makes sense that the 'dream' is what is being told--i.e., a low participant. This explains, then, how the "subjects and objects" of this sentence were communicated by the signs of this grammatical system.

If we compare this analysis to the traditional one of the same sentence, the only real difference is that in our analysis we are making explicit what it is that must be inferred, and what is specifically signalled. The traditional analysis says that the subject is unindicated, but agrees with the verb; and the object is unindicated. This gives us no more information than the "bare lexical elements" in the form-content analysis.

From the discussion, it should be clear that the analysis we are proposing here can account for all uses of the signal  $\ell$  which the traditional grammarians claimed were indirect object uses. Now let us look at a situation involving three participants where the traditional grammarians have claimed that  $\ell$  introduces a direct object:

E 5:10	wəʔap	ʕəmoħəʔəħom	ʕəʔeləmoʔ	ləħom
	and also	their names	we asked	$\ell$ + them
			HI = 1 p1	MID

'We asked them their names also.'

The meanings here are that the FOCUS and HIGH PARTICIPANT is 'the speaker and others'; and 'them' (who the context informs us are the men the speaker 'and others' approached) are MID participants. In addition, there is the term 'their names' which might be a participant. Inasmuch as the activity is one of asking we can infer that the HIGH participant is the asker; and MID participant is the "person in some way involved in the action, having neither the least nor the most responsibility for the occurrence." It then makes sense to look around in the context for a low participant--i.e. something that is asked about--and 'their names' is the logical choice.

If we once again compare this to the traditional analysis, the same observations that we made before about objects (that is, the LOW participant) hold true: they are unindicated in both analyses, but in the form-content analysis, we come right out and say that they must be inferred. As to 'them', the traditional analysis lists it as a direct object--that is, of the same rank as 'their names'. In the form-content analysis, 'them' is a MID participant and as such, more important in precipitating the asking than 'names', but still less important than the HIGH participant. I am not necessarily claiming here that a person who is asked a question is as important as an indirect object--e.g. a servant who is told a dream. Rather, in relative

<sup>8</sup>We are not claiming that a participant system is universal. However, any language that does have a participant system with meanings ranged along a scale will have a meaning such as the MID described here. Work has been done so far in Greek, Latin, Spanish, Modern Hebrew, German, Maranao, Swahili, and English on their participant systems, and all these have a signal whose meaning at least partially overlaps with Biblical Aramaic MID, even though it might be exploited or used differently.



terms, a person who is asked a question is more important in precipitating the asking than the thing being asked about, in that the activity of asking is partly motivated by the presence of someone from whom an answer can be expected. In consistently failing to recognize this differentiation in the relative importance (in the occurrence) of the two objects, traditional grammar has obscured a significant fact of grammar in Biblical Aramaic.

Up to this point, we have discussed two instances which are representative of two common types of sentences in Biblical Aramaic. Let us now discuss all the three-participant sentences in the corpus. There are a total of fourteen (14) verbs that occur at least once in a three participant situation. Of these fourteen, seven (7) are analyzed by traditional grammar as governing an indirect object and a direct object. With these seven verbs, the indirect object is always introduced by the preposition *l*, and the direct object is NEVER introduced by *l*. These verbs are:

TABLE I

3 - participant verbs--traditionally indirect object - direct object

VERB	GLOSS	HIGH	MID (tr. i.o.)	LOW (tr. d.o.)
<i>yḡhab</i>	'give'	giver	receiver	gift
<i>qṛw?</i>	'read'	reader	pers. read to	thing read
<i>nṭan</i>	'give'	giver	receiver	gift
<i>hašṣKah</i>	'find'	finder	pers. ag. whom sth. is found	thing found
<i>haqṛeb</i>	'sacrifice'	sacrificer	God to whom/purpose	thing sacrificed
<i>Bṇḥ</i>	'build'	builder	purpose	edifice
<i>ʔamar</i>	'say, tell'	teller	pers. told	thing told

In the majority of three participant situations involving these seven verbs, what we are calling the low participant (and what traditional grammar calls the direct object) is in fact a bare lexical element, as exemplified in Daniel 2:7. In two cases, however, the low participant is marked as a NON-HIGH participant--i.e., it is an objective pronominal suffix:

D 4:27	<i>hālō?</i>	<i>ds? - hiy?</i>	<i>Babel</i>	<i>raḇātō?</i>	<i>Ḍiy - ʔānḥ</i>
	Qstn + Neg	this is (f.s.)	Babylon	great (f.)	Rel. I
	<i>bṇayātōH</i>		<i>lṇbeyt</i>	<i>malṣkuw</i>	
	I built + her (it)		<i>l</i> + house (of the)	kingdom	
	HI =1 sg; NON-HI =3fs		MID		

'Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for a royal dwelling-place?'

In this sentence, there are three participants: the HIGH participant is the speaker (in this case, King Nebuchadnezzar); the MID participant is the 'royal dwelling-place'; and the NON-HIGH participant is a third person feminine entity, which we infer to be 'great Babylon'. Even though a NON-HIGH participant can fall anywhere in the hierarchy below HIGH, the presence of an explicit MID in the sentence leads us to expect that in this case, the NON-HIGH participant is indeed low, and not mid. This, of course, is the interpretation that makes sense, since Babylon is what was built, and 'royal dwelling-place' is the purpose for which it was built.

D 4:14	<i>Diy</i> - <i>šaliyt</i> <i>ʕilə (y)ʔə (h)</i> <i>Bamaləkuwt</i> <i>ʔānə (w)šəʔ</i>
	conj. ruler most high in + the kingdom (of) men
	<i>wuləman</i> - <i>Diy</i> <i>yisəBeʔ</i> <i>yitəninaH</i>
	and + <i>l</i> + whoever Rel. he wants he will give + it (f.)
	MID HI = 3ms HI = 3ms; NON-HIGH = 3fs
	'...That the Most High ruleth in the Kingdom of Men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will,...'

If we concentrate our attention here on the act of giving, there are three participants involved: the HIGH participant refers to the 'Most High' (i.e. God--no pun intended); the MID participant is 'whomever' (i.e. whomever God wants); the NON-HIGH participant refers to 'the kingdom of men'. As in the previous sentence, the presence of an explicit MID participant in the sentence leads us to infer that in this case the NON-HIGH participant is low rather than mid. Looking at the referents, we see that it indeed makes sense that the recipients are more important (in precipitating the occurrence) than the gift.

The verbs and analysis presented in Table 1 do not contradict the traditional analysis, assuming that one equates indirect object with the meaning MID participant. The difference comes in, however, when we examine the other seven verbs involved in three-participant situations, where, as in Ezra 5:10, the traditional grammarians analyzed both non-subjects as *direct* objects. These seven verbs are:

TABLE II

## 3 - participant verbs--traditionally direct object - direct object

VERB	GLOSS	HIGH	MID (tr. d.o.)	LOW (tr. d.o.)
<i>šəʔel</i>	'ask'	asker	*person asked	thing requested
<i>howdaʕ</i>	'inform'	informer	*person informed	fact
<i>ʔaʕem</i>	'feed'	feeder	*person fed	food
<i>həlbəh</i>	'announce'	announcer	*prs. to whm an'd	announcement
<i>həhəwəh</i>	'announce'	announcer	*prs. to whm an'd	announcement
<i>haləBeš</i>	'clothe'	clother	person clothed	garment
<i>hətiyb</i>	'return'	returner	recipient	thing returned

In all three participant situations involving one of these seven verbs, the low participant is always a bare lexical element. The MID participant is either marked explicitly as MID (all seven verbs occur with *l* marking MID participants) or is NON-HIGH(\*). Ezra 5:10 is an example of the mid participant introduced by *l*. Following is an example of the mid participant referred to by the objective pronominal suffix:

D 2:6	<i>ləhen</i> <i>hələməʔ</i> <i>wəpišəreH</i> <i>həhəwəniy</i>
	but, only dream and + its interp. inform + me!
	HI = 2mp; NON-HIGH = 1 sg.
	'...only declare unto me the dream and the interpretation thereof.'

In this situation, there are two participants indicated morphologically: HIGH participant is the addressee(s); and the NON-HIGH participant is the speaker. However, the activity is one of communication, and there are bare nouns which suit the low role in an activity of communication particularly well--'dream and its interpretation'. In this case, then, the presence of a

bare noun which suits the low role well causes us to infer that the role indicated by the meaning NON-HIGH is closer to mid in this instance than to low.<sup>9</sup>

It has no doubt been noticed by now that there is an apparent similarity between the form-content analysis of the meaning of the objective pronominal suffix, and the traditional analysis of  $\ell$ . In each case, the analysis allows the forms to indicate mid and low participants (in traditional terms, direct and indirect objects). However, the similarity is only apparent. The traditional analysis recognized two separate and distinct  $\ell$ 's (or, at least, two separate and distinct FUNCTIONS of the signal  $\ell$ ). There is no way to discover whether a  $\ell$  is introducing a direct or an indirect object. The form-content analysis recognizes but one single meaning for the objective pronominal suffix--NON-HIGH. This meaning is not ambiguous, but simply imprecise. The great majority of situations in the Biblical Aramaic corpus involve two, and not three participants. For all of these situations, of course, the meaning NON-HIGH is quite suitable to enable one to rank the participants in an occurrence. For the minority of situations involving three participants, the meaning NON-HIGH is simply imprecise. It rules out the possibility that its referent is the HIGH participant, but simply does not specify which NON-HIGH participant its referent is. This must be inferred. However, the inference is fairly simple and straightforward: when the other non-high participant is indicated explicitly as playing a MID role (e.g. in Daniel 4:27), then we infer that the participant marked NON-HIGH is playing a low role; when the other non-high participant is not marked at all as a participant, but is simply a bare lexical element whose meaning is congruent with low importance in that situation, we infer that the participant marked NON-HIGH is playing a mid role--i.e. a role higher than that of the completely unmarked form.

The foregoing inference does not relate to a specific sentence or situation, but rather to a class of sentences or situations. We can refer to such a strategy of inference as STANDARDIZED. Such standardized strategies of inference are an aid to the communicative process in that they require less effort to process than sentence-specific inferences because they are more common, and therefore done more frequently.<sup>10</sup> We shall have occasion to refer to these standard strategies of inference later on in the paper.

Let us return, now, to the mainstream of the discussion. The verbs in Table II are all analyzed by the traditional grammarians as governing double direct objects. However, one of these "direct objects" is invariably marked either by  $\ell$ , or by the objective pronominal suffix. These "direct objects" appear in the MID column in Table II. And the roles played by these mid participants are invariably higher in importance than the roles played by the corresponding low participants in the same situation. Thus, as we discussed before, in an act of asking, the person asked is more important in precipitating the asking--more agent-like--than the thing requested; likewise, in an act of informing, the person informed is more important than the fact; and so on, for the other five verbs. Notice that in an absolute sense, it may very well be the case that these mid participants are all lower in agency (i.e. importance in precipitating the occurrence) than the mid participants of Table I (traditional indirect objects). However, that is not the issue. These meanings are *relative* meanings, and in order to "justify" the use of the meaning MID, it need only be the case that the MID participant in any given occurrence is more agent-like than the low participant in that occurrence. And this is indeed the case for all the verbs in both Table I and Table II. Thus, the participants in the mid columns are of mid importance, whether they are termed direct or indirect objects by traditional

<sup>9</sup>Low (or lower) participant role is NOT an automatic inference from a bare lexical element. First of all, a bare lexical element could be the HIGH participant. Second, such an element could be a spatial or temporal expression. Third, it could be the specification of a pronominal reference (on a preposition or verb) that occurs elsewhere in the sentence, as in D 5:6 where 'king' is just such a bare element.

<sup>10</sup>Previously, we listed as the first premise of the theory that language is an instance of human behavior. It is a part of human nature that we seek to find the easiest way of accomplishing a task. Standard strategies of inference afford an easier way of accomplishing the communication.

grammar. This ends our discussion of three-participant situations in the Biblical Aramaic corpus.<sup>11</sup>

The next type of situation we shall investigate is that involving verbs in the passive. As will be recalled from our discussion of the system of focus, a verb in the passive signals that the participant IN FOCUS is the NON-HIGH participant, and not the HIGH participant. There are three types of passive sentences in Biblical Aramaic, depending on how many participants are on the scene. First, there are sentences with one participant--the participant IN FOCUS:

D: 5:13 *Be?dayin*    *DəniVe?l*    *hu'al*    *qəḏom*    *maləko?*  
                  then       Daniel       he was brought    before       king

NON-HI = 3ms

'Then was Daniel brought in before the king.'

In this sentence, Daniel is the only participant mentioned in the occurrence. (It could be argued that the king here is a participant on the scene; however, its relation to the rest of the sentence is specified by the preposition 'before' as a spatial rather than participatory relation. It is important to note that the option of having 'king' as a participant was open: it could have been marked as a MID participant. It is therefore the choice of a spatial relationship when the option of a participatory relationship was open that makes us infer that 'king' is not a participant in the occurrence.) As the only participant, Daniel is, of course, IN FOCUS; however, because the verb is in the passive, the participant IN FOCUS is also the NON-HIGH participant. Thus we know that in the occurrence of 'leading in', Daniel was the person led in.

The second type of passive sentence involves two participants:

D 2:30 *rozo?*       *dənəh*    *Gēliy*       *liy*  
                  mystery    this       it was revealed    I + me

NON-HI = 3ms       MID

'(Not because of any wisdom...) has this mystery been revealed to me.'<sup>12</sup>

In this occurrence, there are two participants: a NON-HIGH participant IN FOCUS--which we infer to be 'this mystery'; and a MID participant--the speaker. By now we should be familiar with the inferential strategy that a NON-HIGH participant is inferred to be low if there is a MID participant in the same occurrence. We therefore infer that in the act of revelation, a high participant who is not mentioned in the sentence (but from the context we know him to be God) revealed the mystery to the speaker. The speaker is a MID participant in this revelation because he is, after all, an interpreter of dreams and a man of God; the mystery, on the other hand, had no active role in the occurrence.

The third type of passive sentence involves an element specified lexically (by a preposition) as the source or origin of the action, and thus inferrable as the high participant, in addition to a MID and a NON-HIGH participant:

<sup>11</sup>There are two instances of what I would term "real double accusative" in Biblical Aramaic. Both involve coreferentiality of the two objects--an act of naming, and an act of appointing. They are D 5:12 and E 5:14.

<sup>12</sup>This translation is from the American Bible Society. It is more faithful to the Aramaic than that of the Jewish Publication Society in its placement of the negative. The Jewish Publication Society reads: D 2:30 'This secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom....'

E 7:21	wumīNiy	ʔānōh	ʔarəTahəḏasəTəʔ	maləKəʔ
	and + from + me	I	Artaxerxes	king
	ḏiym	ṭəʕem	ləkol	GizabəraYəʔ
	was put	decree	l + all	treasurers
	NON-HI = 3ms		MID	

'And I, even I Artaxerxes the King, do make a decree to all the treasurers...'  
(Note: the translation has been rendered in the active voice, even though the original is in the passive.)

In this situation, the participant IN FOCUS is the decree, and the MID participant is 'all the treasurers'; the occurrence is one of 'making or putting'. As in the previous example, because of the MID participant, we can infer that the NON-HIGH participant IN FOCUS is low. Thus, someone made or put a decree to the treasurers. In this sentence, however, another potential participant is mentioned: the preposition 'from' indicates a point of origin, and in this case "point of origin" is used not in a spatial sense, but in a procedural sense in that the activity of putting or making starts with the king. Thus, even though *min* is not a signal in our system, we can infer that the king nevertheless is a participant in the message.<sup>13</sup>

We can now make two remarks about these passive sentences. First, in order to refer to a high participant, we must go out of the system. The reason for this can be seen in the diagram of the interlocking systems of focus and participants: there is no one signal which means only "HIGH participant." Rather, there is one signal which refers to the participant IN FOCUS, and another signal which tells us whether the participant IN FOCUS is HIGH or NON-HIGH. If the participant IN FOCUS is NON-HIGH, there is no signal in the system which we can use to refer to a high participant.

Second, the objective pronominal suffixes are not used with the passive. The reason for this is that the meaning of this signal vis-a-vis the participant system alone is identical to the meaning of the verb subject agreement morphology in the passive.<sup>14</sup> We would therefore have two participants--one IN FOCUS and one OUT OF FOCUS--having the same degree of agency in a given occurrence. The undesirability of such a situation is obvious.

The last class of sentences we shall discuss in the validation of this analysis is that of sentences involving an active verb and two participants. Because the verb is active, the HIGH participant is IN FOCUS: there are three possible ways, then, to present the lower participant: as a NON-HIGH participant (i.e. the objective pronominal suffix); as a MID participant (introduced by *l*); and as a bare lexical element. Examples are as follows:

D 6:17	huwʔ	yəḏeyzəbīNək
	he	he will deliver + thee
	HI = 3ms; NON-HI = 2ms	
	'He will deliver thee.'	

<sup>13</sup>The expression 'to make a decree' was an idiom in Biblical Aramaic, occurring 19 times in the corpus. Nine occurrences are active, nine passive, and one reflexive.

The use of the preposition meaning 'from' to introduce the agent in a passive sentence is not unheard of. Compare German *von*.

<sup>14</sup>Unfortunately, there were not enough examples of passive sentences in order to determine whether the FOCUS in a passive sentence is really LOW or NON-HIGH. I decided on NON-HIGH because it represents a weaker claim (which includes the more specific LOW). Although there are no clear-cut instances of a MID participant in a three-participant situation showing up as the FOCUS of a passive verb, there are instances such as between D 2:25 and D 5:13, where a MID participant in a two-participant situation is the FOCUS of a passive verb.





and his interlocutor. From our knowledge of the cultural interchange known as "saying" we know that this is an activity involving three participants most of the time: two interlocutors and a communication. The active interlocutor is the high participant; the passive (or receptive) interlocutor is the mid participant; and the communication is the low participant. This analysis of the act of speech into three participant roles is another instance of a standard strategy of inference. Therefore, even in a situation where the communication is not listed as a participant (in D 2:24, the communication is quoted directly), the strategy is still appealed to, and the passive interlocutor is indicated as a MID participant.

In contrasting our analysis of these sentences with that of traditional grammar, I believe that--terminology aside--we basically have the same analysis for sentences like D 2:24. Traditionally, the lower participants are always indirect objects, because there is a direct object understood. This explanation is similar to the inferential strategy just stated above. The real difference lies in our treatment of the two types of sentences exemplified in D 3:28.

The traditional grammarians claim that both sentence types represented in D 3:28 are sentences involving a subject and a direct object, and that there is no substantive difference between them. In our analysis, however, there is a great deal of difference between them. They are similar in that they distinguish the HIGH from the lower participant in a two participant situation, which, as we have brought out earlier, is the prime function of the system. However, they achieve this in different manners: In one, there is a HIGH participant IN FOCUS, and a bare lexical item, which is inferred to be lower. In the second, there is also a HIGH participant IN FOCUS, and a MID participant. The difference between the two types lies in the difference between marking a lower participant specifically MID, or allowing it to be inferred as lower. Since either course of action will achieve the prime communicative function, this choice can be used to note subtler distinctions for secondary functions or purposes.

By and large, there are two secondary purposes in using the signal *l*--and the meaning MID--to indicate the lower of two participants in a two participant situation. Both of them can be exemplified in D 2:25:

D: 2:25	ʔēdayīn	ʔarəyowk	... hanəʕel	lədoniyeʔel
	then	Arioch	he brought	<i>l</i> + Daniel
			HI = 3ms	MID

'Then Arioch brought in Daniel (before the king in haste).'

In this sentence there is an act of bringing, with two participants: the HIGH participant is third person masculine singular, and we infer this to be Arioch. The MID participant is Daniel. Since the act of bringing (i.e. causing to come) usually involves only two participants, we infer that whichever participant is not HIGH is the participant that was brought. 'Daniel', then, was brought. As to the two reasons that 'Daniel' was marked as MID, rather than left as a bare lexical element, the first has to do with the absolute degree of Daniel's importance in precipitating the occurrence. In D 2:25, Arioch is not bringing Daniel in before the king dead or unconscious, or in chains, or even simply at the request of the king. On the contrary, it is Daniel who is initiating the royal interview. Arioch is only bringing him in because one doesn't barge in on a king unannounced and unescorted. We can see, then, that Daniel did have a good deal of importance in precipitating Arioch's bringing him in before the king. We can give recognition to this importance by marking Daniel MID, as has been done here.

The second reason for marking Daniel MID has to do not with Daniel's actual importance in precipitating the occurrence, but with his potential importance. The choice that we have is either marking Daniel MID, or leaving him as a bare lexical element. However, bare lexical elements can either be inferred low or high. In D 2:25, there already is one bare lexical element--Arioch. (Remember, HIGH participant is signalled by verb morphology only,

and it only specifies the person, number and gender of the HIGH participant, not the exact referent.) Had 'Daniel' as well as 'Arioch' been bare in D 2:25, it would have been a lot harder to infer which of the two was the higher participant, and which was the lower. The increased difficulty stems from the fact that both Daniel and Arioch are people, and people--statistically--stand a much greater chance of being HIGH participants than things. This is what I meant when I said Daniel's potential importance--i.e. his animateness. If we look at Tables I and II, we see that the HIGH participants there are invariably animate, while the low participants are almost invariably inanimate. This is one of the reasons that the grammar can regularly afford to allow participants to be inferred from the bare lexicon, without danger of confusion: bare lexical elements which are animate are generally HIGH participants, while those that are inanimate are generally inferred to be low (or lower) participants. A corollary of this statistic is that MID participants are also generally animate. (Refer again to Tables I and II; note also that the first reason given for 'Daniel's having been marked MID--his *actual* importance in precipitating the occurrence.) The net effect of these statistics is the following strategy in determining how to express lower participants in a two participant situation:

1) The simplest course is to leave the participant a bare lexical element. This course is generally followed if the lower participant is inanimate, for the reasons given above (namely, it makes sense, and is consequently easy, to infer that a bare lexical inanimate element is a lower participant). If the lower participant is animate, this course is only occasionally followed, and only in those circumstances where there is very little danger of confusion with the HIGH participant.

2) The alternative is to mark the lower participant MID. This course is followed a) if it is desirable to stress the MID importance of the lower participant, as in the case in D 2:25, where Daniel initiated the interview; b) if it is desirable to preclude the possibility of the lower participant being inferred as HIGH; and/or c) as a sort of general strategy in keeping with a) and b) above and capitalizing on the general skewing (that we already remarked upon) between animateness and the high end of the participant scale, if the lower participant is animate.

Throughout the next several pages, we shall examine some representative examples of the few sentences in the Biblical Aramaic corpus which do not seem to adhere to this strategy, particularly those instances where the lower participant is specified as MID even though it is inanimate. (Examples of animate lower participants not indicated as MID but left as bare lexical elements do not need to be explained in any way, since no meaning is attributed to the bare lexicon, and the inference LOWER PARTICIPANT is sufficiently precise to express the ranking of the participants. Nevertheless, we will note one systematic departure of this nature.)

D 7:2	ʔarʔBaʕ	ruwhey	šmaʔaʔ	maglyhʔn	layaʔaʔ	raʔaʔ
	four	winds	(of) heaven	stir up	l + sea	great

HI = f. pl. MID

'The four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea.'<sup>15</sup>

In this instance, there are several reasons that 'sea' is a MID participant. First, both participants here are inanimate, which means that the strategy for differentiating animate HIGH participants from animate or inanimate lower participants is inappropriate. Second, even though the four winds may be mostly responsible for the sea's activities in this case, the sea itself can hardly be said to be completely inactive in the absence of winds. What we have,

<sup>15</sup>This translation is from the American Bible Society. Their translation of the verb is more faithful than that of the Jewish Publication Society, which has: D 7:2 'The four winds of heaven *broke forth upon* the great sea.' (cf. Rosenthal's gloss for the verb: 'to stir up', Marti's gloss 'erregen, in Aufruhr, Bewegung bringen.')



rather, is the winds simply amplifying the natural activity of the sea. Thus, the sea does have some importance in precipitating the occurrence.

In a second interesting "departure," an inanimate lower participant is marked MID not because of its importance within the activity, but rather to point up the importance of the activity as a whole: a single lexical verb 'bring' is used three times in connection with King Belshazzar's having holy vessels brought to his party to be used as wine glasses:

D 5:2 Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels (MID) which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king and his lords, his consorts and his concubines, might drink therein.

D 5:3 Then they brought the golden vessels (bare lexicon) that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his consorts and his concubines, drank in them.

At this point, the fingers of a man's hand write on the wall, and Daniel is brought in to interpret this writing. As he interprets the writing, he also chastizes Belshazzar:

D 5:22 And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thy heart, though thou knewest all this;

D 5:23 But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of Heaven; and they have brought the vessels (MID) of His house before thee, and thou and thy lords, thy consorts and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them.

In Daniel 5:2, Belshazzar orders that the vessels be brought in to be desecrated. This is a heinous deed because God's holy vessels are to be used in a profane manner. The vessels are marked as a MID participant to point out the importance of the activity. However, in Daniel 5:3, they (his guards or slaves) are merely carrying out his orders in bringing the vessels. Here the vessels are bare lexicon, as the guards' obeying the king's orders is not an activity of crucial importance. In verse 23, however, Daniel is chastizing Belshazzar for his terrible deed--namely, having the vessels brought in. Here again, we are linking the person responsible for the action with the heinous action itself, and the vessels are MID.

Finally, there is a type of departure from the strategy--more or less systematic--which even the traditional grammarians noticed: If the lower of two participants in a two participant situation does not have a great deal of importance (absolutely) in precipitating the occurrence, and is in the absolute state, that participant is left as bare lexicon, whether animate or inanimate. For example,

D 2:21	<i>māhaʿādeh</i>	<i>malākiyn</i>	<i>umāhəqeym</i>	<i>malākiyn</i>
	he removes	kings	and + he sets up	kings
	HI = m.s.		HI =m.s.	
	'He removeth kings and setteth up kings;'			

I have not made any analysis of the "states" in Biblical Aramaic. In general, however, the absolute state is said to differ from the other two (construct and determinate (or emphatic) in that a noun in the absolute state is not DEFINITE. Although I have made no counts to establish the relative frequency of absolutes versus non-absolutes in subject and object position, it seems a fair assumption that there would be very few absolute nouns as subjects, as subjects are, in fact, IN FOCUS, and it is customary to focus on an entity already known

to the interlocutors.<sup>16</sup> If this is indeed the case, this would reduce the "potential importance" of such participants, reducing the danger of mistaking them as inferred HIGHS, rather than lower participants.

In the entire Biblical Aramaic corpus, there are only twenty odd sentences involving two participants where the lower participant is not MID or bare in accordance with the general strategy discussed above. We have already discussed many of them and proposed specific reasons for the departure from the strategy in those cases. While we can do the same for most of the remaining exceptions, it should be pointed out that this strategy is in no sense a "rule of grammar," to which these twenty odd sentences represent counterexamples. The basic premise of this paper is that the distribution of forms in the language is to be explained by the meaning of the forms, bearing in mind that messages are inferred from collections of meanings. In inferring messages from the meanings, various strategies of inference may be employed with greater or lesser degrees of frequency. We have been discussing one particular strategy for inferring participants which is based on animateness. What we have, for the sake of convenience, been referring to as the "twenty odd departures from this strategy" are simply instances of different--less common, but equally understandable--strategies for inferring the participant rankings in Biblical Aramaic.<sup>17</sup>

This concludes the direct validation for the systems of focus and agency presented here. Before going on to contrast this analysis with the traditional one, there is one piece of indirect validation I would like to mention briefly: all this time, we have been discussing the system of agency and its signals. However, one of these signals--*l*--also has other uses or functions. Some of these might prove to be simple extensions of the meaning MID; however, one is not a simple extension, but rather a homonymous signal with a different (if historically related) meaning: PLACE TO WHICH. This homonymy could give rise to ambiguities in communication, especially considering that *l*--MID--is often used to characterize participants which have very little actual importance in precipitating the occurrence, but who happen to be animate. Consider the verb 'send' associated with a person prefixed by *l*. Is that person the person sent (i.e. the lower of two participants who happens to be animate), or the person to whom (i.e. PLACE TO WHICH, animate)?

A moment's reflection will suffice to realize that this "problem" only occurs with animates which are "places." That is, if an inanimate noun is marked with *l*, either its importance in precipitating the occurrence will be apparent, or it will be a place; however, if an animate participant is marked *l*, there is nothing other than brute inference from the rest of the sentence to tell us whether it is a participant or place. The solution to this problem lies in the fact that it is a pseudo-problem: *l* does not indicate PLACE TO WHICH with animates in Biblical Aramaic; the propositions *ʿal* and *ʿad* are used instead (c.f. Rosenthal, 1968:34). For example,

E 4:23	ʔāzaluw	bibəhiyluw	liyrwšʔlem	ʿal - yəhuwdsəyeʔ
	they went	in + haste	<i>l</i> + Jerusalem	ʿal + the Jews
	HI = 3 p1		PLACE TO WHICH	PRSN TO WHICH
	'...they went in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews,...'			

It is my belief that both the extension of *l*--MID--to unimportant but animate participants, and the extension of *ʿal* to mean PERSON TO WHICH are Aramaic innovations, and are related to each other. The relation is that as the use of *l* was expanded in one direction, another--potentially ambiguous--use was discontinued. All this, of course, would have to be substantiated by an investigation of earlier stages of Aramaic.

<sup>16</sup>Mayer Lambert made the same point in his article. He brought out the fact that this parallels the uses of the accusative marker *et* in Hebrew, which is also restricted to definite direct objects.

<sup>17</sup>A full listing of all such "departures" appears in Bauer and Leander, pp. 340-341.

## 5. FORM-CONTENT ANALYSIS CONTRASTED WITH TRADITIONAL

In section 3, we listed three "inadequacies" of traditional grammar in dealing with subjects and objects, and two correlations which they could not explain. We shall now try to show how the form-content analysis overcomes (or obviates) these inadequacies, and explains the correlations.

A) How does a speaker know when to introduce a direct object with  $\ell$ , and when to leave it unindicated? Rephrased in terms of the form-content analysis, this question becomes: "When is a lower participant marked MID, and when is it left as bare lexicon to be inferred as low or lower?" The answer is that it is marked MID if there is a communicative function to be served by specifying its MID importance in precipitating the occurrence. In other words, the form  $\ell$  is used if, and only if the meaning MID is needed in order to effect the communication.

B) How does a hearer know whether a given  $\ell$  is introducing a direct object or an indirect object? There is no way to restate this question.  $\ell$  means MID, no matter how the traditional grammarians interpreted it. The "function" of the meaning MID must be inferred for every sentence, on the basis of the meanings of the other forms in the sentence. This, however, is true of all meanings. We must again stress, that all uses of  $\ell$  in the system of agency can be explained on the basis of the meaning MID, always bearing in mind, of course, the relative nature of the meanings.

C) If the objective pronominal suffixes really indicate direct objects only, how does one explain the suffix in:

D 5:6	ʔēdayin	maləkoʔ	ziywohiy	šənowhiy
	then	king	his countenances	they changed (intr.) + him
				HI = 3 pl; NON-HI = 3ms

'Then the king's countenance was changed in him.'

bearing in mind that the verb 'change' is INTRANSITIVE? In the form-content analysis, the meaning of the objective pronominal suffix is NON-HIGH, which is perfectly congruent with the "dative-like" use in Daniel 5:6.<sup>18</sup>

The two correlations that the traditional grammarians could not explain are: i) The vast majority of direct objects introduced by  $\ell$  are animate. I believe that we have devoted sufficient space to explaining the statistical correlation between animateness and MID participation, and the development of a widespread strategy capitalizing on this statistical correlation.

ii) Of the many occurrences of double direct objects, there are almost none in which both direct objects are introduced in the same manner.

The two participants which the traditional grammarians called "double direct objects" are not of the same rank. As we showed in Table II and the discussion following, one of the two participants is always slightly more important in precipitating the occurrence. The methods of introducing the two non-high participants reflect this difference of relative importance, which explains why they are not introduced in the same manner.

<sup>18</sup>Brockelmann, p. 322, cites D 5:6 as an instance of a dative use of the objective pronominal suffix.

## 6. RECENT TRANSFORMATIONAL-GENERATIVE APPROACHES TO CASE

This is hardly the place to conduct an in depth review of the various methods in which modern Transformational grammarians have dealt with case phenomena. However, I believe we can bring out one or two characteristics which most generative accounts of case have in common, and discuss these characteristics in the light of the analysis just presented.

The first characteristic is that case is accounted for semantically in the deep structure. This is obviously true for those grammarians who recognize case as a semantic primitive (e.g. Fillmore, Chafe, etc.); however, it is also true for those grammarians who account for case in terms of abstract predicates (e.g. Lakoff's Instrumental, Locative), deleted prepositions (many treatments of the English Indirect Object) or pure relation between constituents (e.g. the way Chomsky defined "subject" and "object" in *Aspects*). These deep structure cases are usually based on some logical categorization of relations which is universal in nature. The categorization is almost always absolute, rather than relative.<sup>19</sup>

The second characteristic is that the case manifestations in the surface structure are accounted for by transformations, as is the nature of transformational grammar. Usually, however, these transformations are arbitrary in that they do not consistently relate one deep structure case to one surface structure manifestation, nor is there very often any reason given for transformation X transforming DEEP CASE VII to SURFACE CASE 6 in such and such an environment, and SURFACE CASE 7 in such and such environment. The height of this arbitrariness occurs in languages with "government" where along with the verb in the lexicon is listed the surface manifestation of the OBJECTIVE (or whatever) case that occurs with that verb.

These two characteristics can also be found in traditional grammar, as well. Many traditional analyses first discuss the abstract case relations in a language (or in LANGUAGE), and then the various ways of expressing these relations in the forms of the language.

I believe that we have spent the bulk of this paper in demonstrating that analysis based on these two characteristics cannot account for the facts of Biblical Aramaic. First of all, in a generative grammar, one would have to be able to specify RELATIVE CASE-VALUES for Biblical Aramaic. It has been a cardinal point of this paper that the case meanings posited here are relative, not absolute, in nature. Thus, a role that in some universal case categorization might be "dative" in an absolute sense might be in Biblical Aramaic MID, or NON-HIGH, or simply a bare lexical item, depending on the relative importance (and the number) of the other participants in the occurrence.

Secondly, one would have to be able to account for--whether in the transformational component or the deep structure of a generative grammar--the various different strategies used by speakers of the language to convey messages with the grammatical meanings. For example, we discussed the common strategy whose roots are in the positive correlation between HIGH importance in precipitating the occurrence and animateness. We also illustrated another strategy where the meaning MID was used not to describe the importance of that participant in the occurrence per se, but rather to highlight and call attention to the importance of the act itself. (Recall our discussion of the vessels in *Daniel*, chapter 5.) To the best of my knowledge, no current type of transformational analysis can handle considerations of this sort. However, all of this can be accomplished by assigning meanings directly to the forms of the language, as we have done in Biblical Aramaic, and then by providing for the inference of messages from the use of these meanings by whatever means the speaker and hearer have at their disposal. I believe that this type of analysis opens a whole new way of looking at forms and their use in language. By striving to understand the single meanings which underlie the varied ways in which given forms are used, we can further our understanding of how man uses language to communicate.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup>A noteworthy exception to this generalization is Hetzron's use of "ascending," "straight," and "descending" effects (pp. 333 ff.). In general, Dr. Hetzron's treatment of case in Amharic is refreshing and novel approach within the transformational framework.

<sup>20</sup>Examples of other research that has been done in form-content analysis, listed in the bibliography are: Diver, García, Kirsner, Klein.

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# **FIRST NORTH-AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON SEMITIC LINGUISTICS**

**Santa Barbara, California**

**March 24-25, 1973**

The first North-American Conference on Semitic Linguistics was organized by Robert Hetzron (University of California, Santa Barbara) with the cooperation of Giorgio Buccellati (University of California, Los Angeles) and Joseph L. Malone (Barnard College-Columbia University). The purpose of the Conference is to promote the interest of Semitists in the various modern currents of linguistics. The full list of the papers presented at the 1973 Conference is given below. Those papers which have been submitted and accepted for inclusion in *AAL*, like the present one, are being published within the framework of the journal.

## **A. Semitic and its Afroasiatic Cousins**

1. Carleton T. Hodge (University of Indiana), *The Nominal Sentence in Semitic* (=AAL<sup>2</sup>/4).
2. G. Janssens (University of Ghent, Belgium), *The Semitic Verbal System* (=AAL<sup>2</sup>/4).
3. J. B. Callender (UCLA), *Afroasiatic Cases and the Formation of Ancient Egyptian Verbal Constructions with Possessive Suffixes* (=AAL<sup>2</sup>/6).
4. Russell G. Schuh (UCLA), *The Chadic Verbal System and its Afroasiatic Nature* (forthcoming in *AAL*).
5. Andrzej Zaborski (University of Cracow, Poland), *The Semitic External Plural in an Afroasiatic Perspective* (forthcoming in *AAL*).

## **B. Ancient Semitic Languages**

6. Giorgio Buccellati (UCLA), *On the Akkadian "Attributive" Genitive* (forthcoming in *AAL*).
7. Daniel Ronnie Cohen (Columbia University), *Subject and Object in Biblical Aramaic: A Functional Approach Based on Form-Content Analysis* (=AAL<sup>2</sup>/1).
8. Richard Steiner (Touro College, N.Y.), *Evidence from a Conditioned Sound Change for Lateral ɖ in Pre-Aramaic*.
9. Stanislav Segert (UCLA), *Verbal Categories of Some Northwest Semitic Languages: A Didactical Approach* (=AAL<sup>2</sup>/5).
10. Charles Krahmalkov (University of Michigan), *On the Noun with Heavy Suffixes in Punic*.

## **C. Hebrew**

11. Joseph L. Malone (Barnard College-Columbia University), *Systematic vs. Autonomous Phonemics and the Hebrew Grapheme "dagesh"* (=AAL<sup>2</sup>/7).
12. Allan D. Corré (University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee), *"Wāw" and "Digamma"* (forthcoming in *AAL*).
13. Harvey Minkoff (Hunter College, N.Y.), *A Feature Analysis of the Development of Hebrew Cursive Scripts* (=AAL<sup>1</sup>/7).
14. Raphael Nir (Hebrew University, Jerusalem), *The Survival of Obsolete Hebrew Words in Idiomatic Expressions* (=AAL<sup>2</sup>/3).
15. Talmy Givón (UCLA), *On the Role of Perceptual Clues in Hebrew Relativization* (=AAL<sup>2</sup>/8).
16. Alan C. Harris (UCLA), *The Relativization "which that is" in Israeli Hebrew*.

## **D. Arabic**

17. Ariel A. Bloch (University of California, Berkeley), *Direct and Indirect Relative Clauses in Arabic*.
18. Frederic J. Cadora (Ohio State University), *Some Features of the Development of Telescoped Words in Arabic Dialects and the Status of Koiné II*.

## **E. Ethiopian**

19. Gene B. Gragg (University of Chicago), *Morpheme Structure Conditions and Underlying Form in Amharic* (forthcoming in *AAL*).
20. C. Douglas Johnson (University of California, Santa Barbara), *Phonological Channels in Chaha* (=AAL<sup>2</sup>/2).
21. Robert Hetzron (University of California, Santa Barbara), *The t-Converb in Western Gurage and the Role of Analogy in Historical Morphology* (=AAL<sup>2</sup>/2).

## **F. Beyond Afroasiatic**

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